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## **7. Walking the city: A method for exploring everyday public pedagogies**

Keri Facer and Magdalena Buchczyk

### **Introduction**

Bristol, our home town, has a famous tower that stands on one of its highest points. Climbing up inside the narrow staircase in the dark, you suddenly come to an archway at the top that brings you out blinded into the light and to a vision of the city spreading out beyond you: the parks, the river, the serried ranks of brightly coloured terraced houses climbing the many hills, the corporate headquarters by the docks, the trainlines snaking through the housing estates in the suburbs, the view out to the countryside beyond. From this perspective, it's tempting to believe you can hold the city in the sweep of your hand as you reach out and draw it all in. As de Certeau (1984) observed, this elevated position is the vantage point from which plans can be made, blueprints drawn up for the city; top down, it gives the impression of a comprehensive and comprehensible view of the city. From this God's eye view, however, the everyday, street-level behaviours that generate the actual lived experience of the city are invisible. The small acts, the everyday decisions, the repeated practices of short cuts and preferred strolls that produce the lived geography of the city remain out of sight. For those living in the city, seeking to build resources that support their own and others' learning, the question is—how to make comprehensible the micro-practices that constitute the learning infrastructures that are being built. This tension between the top down vision of the city planner and the lived experience of individuals actually navigating and making that city through everyday

activities, as well as the conceptual and methodological challenges of exploring the everyday practices of learning, are the focus for this chapter.

### **Background: the Learning City**

In 2013, the UNESCO Learning Cities network (made up of several hundred cities across the world and of which Bristol is a part) made the following declaration:

We recognize that we live in a complex, fast-changing world where social, economic and political norms are constantly redefined. Economic growth and employment, urbanization, demographic change, scientific and technological advances, cultural diversity and the need to maintain human security and public safety represent just a few of the challenges to the governance and sustainability of societies. We affirm that, in order to empower citizens—understood as all residents of cities and communities—we must strive to give them access to and encourage their use of a broad array of learning opportunities throughout their lives. (Unesco Learning Cities Network 2015)

In this declaration, the Learning Cities network is reflecting a wider trend in urban studies as a whole, in which learning—both formal and informal—is increasingly viewed as central to enabling cities' adaptation to economic, technological and social change. Alongside this declaration are 42 indicators and measures that aim to track the extent to which a city might be described as a *learning* city. These include measures associated with social cohesion and political participation, with gender equality and economic growth, with teacher quality and participation in learning activities in homes, community and schools.

This attention to learning as a means of adapting to social change is not simply the concern of agencies such as UNESCO. Increasingly, urban studies scholars are arguing that without attention to the role of learning in urban change, all other moves toward creating sustainable future cities will not be achievable (e.g. Hambleton 2016).

Cities and city mayors around the world are therefore beginning to actively experiment in this area. This experimentation is taking many different forms, from the ‘city as laboratory’ initiatives associated with the Smart Cities and the Urban Living Labs movements to the ‘resilient’ cities approach promoted by the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of the Learning City (or Educating City) has its own distinct genealogy within this landscape. It originates in the 1972 UNESCO Report of the International Commission on the Development of Education *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Faure et al 1972), with its vision of learning as a means of creating sustainable cities. The idea later gained widespread purchase on educational and economic discourses in the 1990s through its association with the OECD/EU/Delors vision of the learning society. In so doing, it became closely articulated with the concepts of lifelong learning as a strategic response to the economic and intellectual transformations associated with the idea of the knowledge economy (Longworth 2006; Osborne, Kearns & Yang 2013). In this articulation, successful cities were framed as those in which citizens successfully invested in themselves, upgraded their capabilities to meet the changing exigencies of global competition and clustered in creative innovation networks in which new ideas, skills and services were developed, all the better to enable the city to compete in the global marketplace (Florida 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> See the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities Network <http://www.100resilientcities.org/>; the European Urban Living Labs network <http://www.urbantransformations.ox.ac.uk/blog/2017/european-urban-living-labs-as-experimental-city-to-city-learning-platforms/>; and the UK's Urban Living Pilots <http://urbanliving.epsrc.ac.uk/>

Juceviciene's (2010) case study of the process of turning Kaunas, Lithuania, into a Learning City exemplifies how the idea of the Learning City can be enacted in practice. Here, there are clear and somewhat dogmatic associations presented about what constitutes desirable learning in the city. Juceviciene (2010, p. 422) describes how, in Kaunas, the aim of the Learning Cities programme was to 'make its citizens aware of the need for continuous learning'; to 'transform[...] organisations into learning organisations'; and to encourage 'learning professionally and emotionally in families'. It had a set of sanctioned forms of learning that it promoted, encouraging 'dissemination of 'good practice', festivals of learning and other means' (p. 422) And it valued, in particular, certain forms of learning in so far as they 'enabl[e] continuous learning of individuals and organisations to acquire modern competences, competitiveness in the market, quality leisure time and good relationships' (p. 422).

This perspective, however, fails to acknowledge or value any everyday learning that might pre-exist the formal city-led initiative. Indeed, citizens are chided in the paper for ideas of learning that 'lacked the depth described by constructivist writers' (Juceviciene 2010, p. 423) and the author describes herself as being 'unable to find any true learning organisations which fulfilled the criteria as normally defined in the city' (p. 425). Indeed, this vision of a Learning City, at least as interpreted through this author's eyes, seems to be premised wholly on a deficit model of citizens' capacities to innovate and learn. As Plumb, Leverman and McGray (2007) observe, in this framing 'A city becomes a learning city not just when learning prevails, but when a certain *type* of learning prevails' (p. 44, emphasis in original).

Whether these ideas of the Learning City can be enlarged to acknowledge and build upon the citizen-led and sometimes unruly practices of everyday learning in the city, whether they can encompass a more plural notion of what counts as ‘learning’ that is more recognisable from the street level of the city, may determine, in the end, whether the Learning Cities discourse can encompass the rich diversity of human life, or whether it simply becomes another initiative co-opted to the preparation of human capital for the labour market.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to begin to work out how we might develop conceptual and methodological tools to produce a more plural account of everyday and street-level learning in the city.

### **Public pedagogy and the Learning City**

The Learning Cities policy field has been developed with limited reference to the existing literature on urban education and to the education research field in general. Equally, the educational research field has not yet fully engaged with these city-scale developments and has not yet begun to provide substantive empirical analysis or theoretical foundations to address this question of how ‘cities’ can be understood to ‘learn’ (although see Lido et al (2016) and related publications as notable exceptions). As Sandlin, O’Malley and Burdick (2011) have argued, the education research field is only now beginning to reposition itself to address learning outside schools and universities:

the shift from spaces that are governed by institutional metaphors and hierarchies to spaces in which education and learning take on more

performative, improvisational, subtle, and hidden representations potentially calls for researchers and theorists to examine their methods, epistemological and ontological assumptions, and language to avoid the synecdochical association of education as schooling. (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 362)

For the purposes of beginning to map the messy, complex, interconnected practices of learning in the city through a lens that is not framed by schooling, we propose to work with the concept of *public pedagogy*, which has a longstanding pedigree in education, albeit one that is suffering from some problems of definition (Sandlin et al. 2011).

*Public pedagogy* is defined by Sandlin, Schultz and Burdick (2010) as:

a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites. It involves learning in institutions such as museums, zoos, and libraries; in informal educational sites such as popular culture, media, commercial spaces, and the Internet; and through figures and sites of activism, including public intellectuals and grassroots social movements (Sandlin et al. 2010, p. 338-339).

Public pedagogy, as it is currently understood within the research field, is seen to be associated with places that are distinct from formal education. Sandlin et al. (2011) argue that the scholarship frames public pedagogy in five key areas of activity: 1) citizenship and public oriented learning activities within and beyond schools, 2) the pedagogic practices of popular culture in and of everyday life, 3) the role of informal institutions such as museums and galleries, and public spaces, 4) the production of identities and ways of living through dominant cultural discourses, and 5) the work of public intellectuals and social activists. This scholarship draws attention to how everything from graffiti to arts practices to activism ‘teaches’. Drawing on the Gramscian traditions of cultural studies, it foregrounds the identity work of cultural practices and their invitation to inhabit particular ways of being in the world. For the

study of learning cities this work is therefore invaluable; drawing attention, as it does, to the multiple and highly diverse practices of ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ that are present in the everyday life of cities.

What is missing in this field at present, however, is a theoretical framing that might enable an interrogation of the inter-relationship between these different elements and the ways in which they work with and against each other as they collide in citizens’ lived experience of the city. How/are the public pedagogies of city streets and activist networks articulated with the museums and galleries? How/are the advertising hoardings and shop fronts articulated with the work of public intellectuals? To understand learning in the city as more than a disconnected set of discrete cultural practices we need to more closely understand the multi-layered nature of public pedagogies in place.

### **Walking as method**

In the Reinventing Learning Cities project<sup>2</sup> of which this chapter reports on just one part, we adopt a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus 1995; Pierides 2010) to enable us to trace how what we are calling a ‘learning infrastructure’ (understood as interconnected social, discursive and material resources that facilitate learning) is produced in the city (Facer & Buchczyk 2019). In so doing, we recognise that such resources do not simply pre-exist the attention of the researcher—or indeed the learner—they are created and recreated through analysis and participation. As Larkin (2013) argues:

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://learningcitiesproject.org/>



Infrastructures are not, in any positivist sense, simply “out there.” The act of defining an infrastructure is a categorizing moment. Taken thoughtfully, it comprises a cultural analytic that highlights the epistemological and political commitments involved in selecting what one sees as infrastructural (and thus causal) and what one leaves out (p. 330).

If we seek to understand the heterogeneous activities that create possibilities for learning in the city, therefore, we cannot respond to this challenge simply by identifying a set of activities that we feel constitute ‘everyday learning’ and start from those sites; we need to avoid beginning with framework that filters, in advance, the sites and places that we pay attention to as reservoirs of ‘valuable learning’. Instead, we need a different way in to the learning activities of the city.

To respond to this challenge, we were playfully inspired by de Certeau’s (1984) original essay ‘Walking in the city’, which set the everyday practices of citizens walking city streets and making their own lively urban geography in opposition to the blueprint perspective of the planners and city designers. We were also inspired by Amin’s (2015) call to pay attention to:

The plurality of things happening, the changes occurring over the course of the day, the many different pursuits and affects of the people gathered, the resonances of the still architecture and silent infrastructure, the amplifications of the amassed bodies and entities (p, 252)

Both our interest in public pedagogy and in learning infrastructure encouraged us, therefore, to adopt a method of *walking the city*. This approach—which derives from urban studies, from archaeology and from literary studies (Pierce & Lawhon 2015)—would enable us to attend to the lively jumble of learning activities as experienced ‘on the ground’ by citizens of the city. Walking, we hoped, would enable us to connect up

the different sites and practices of learning highlighted by the public pedagogy traditions and in so doing would allow us to trace what learning infrastructures emerge in the course of everyday walking routes in the city. Our approach, however, was not the open-ended curiosity-driven stroll of the flaneur (Benjamin 1940/1999), nor the psychogeography of the Situationists. Rather, we follow Pierce and Lawhon (2015) in taking a more explicit approach to enhance the trustworthiness of the work, potentially enabling comparisons and replicability of our method.

We chose three routes that encompassed significant high streets of the city of Bristol in three different neighbourhoods: first, in the affluent area of Clifton we traced the path of Whiteladies Road through an area of town associated strongly with the university, the BBC and high income residents; second, we followed the more bohemian interconnected streets of Stokes Croft and Gloucester Road that link the city centre via an area known for its activism, to the more sedate left leaning but affluent area of Gloucester Road, famous for the longest road of independent shops in the UK; third, the we walked the highly ethnically diverse interconnected routes of Stapleton Road and St Mark's Road, the first infamously described as 'the worst street in Britain' by the national press, the latter rapidly gentrifying. These routes were chosen because we know they are lively centres of activity within the city; because they offer us insight into diverse communities' resources and practices; because they allow us to challenge some of the assumptions about the balance of learning resources in the city as a whole (a narrative that assumes that the wealthy places are predominantly well-served with facilities), and because they enable us (as Pierce and Lawhon advocate) to start with a familiar place, in our case, the Gloucester Road, an area one of us has lived around for nearly two decades.

For each route, we followed the high street until it no longer seemed to be ‘lively’—in other words, we followed the street to the points at which it no longer acted as a gathering place for pedestrians. This means that each route differed in length and each walk differed in duration. Our purpose here was not to produce a quantifiable comparison in terms of density of learning activities, for example, but to create a rich picture of the activities that might afford learning in each place. To focus our attention during the walks, we drew on the categories of public pedagogy identified by Sandlin et al. (2011); this meant that our walks paid attention to the following:

1. the streetscape and the identities that it invites citizens to perform through official notices, advertising, graffiti
2. memorialisation, museums, historical sites inviting engagement
3. sites of grassroots action and collective activism
4. institutions offering explicit learning activities
5. invitations to participate in the work or encounter with public intellectuals or university-associated activities
6. invitations to engage with popular cultural practices in pubs, cafes
7. invitations to action presented by shops and shopping centres.

We adapted this framework, however, after early pilots of the walking method. The early walks for example, required us to ask what precisely we were interested in when we were looking for learning activities in these spaces. What, after all, did not count as an everyday learning practice? Insistently, we realised that we wanted to exclude both commercial advertisements and official instructions, signs and rules both for

practical reasons (documenting them all would overwhelm the process) and for more substantive reasons. We agreed that we were not interested simply in how the city teaches its inhabitants to behave (how a city ‘educates attention’ or affects the body has already been documented by researchers such as Elizabeth Grosz (1998), Tim Ingold (2000) or Colin McFarlane 2011). Instead, we were interested in learning activities understood as what Fenwick and Edwards (2010) describe as the opportunity for ‘expanded possibilities of action’. In other words, learning as an expansion rather than a restriction of current ways of being. To this end, the strict injunctions of the street sign or the narrow appeals to consumption of commercial advertisements, could not, we felt, be included in the maps we would be drawing of everyday learning in this city. This is not to say that such invitations are not pedagogic, clearly, they are; our interest, however, is in the plural and diverse opportunities that a city offers for everyday learning, for the expansion of self that is distinctive in the encounter between self and the city. Some advertisements challenged our analytic frame: what were we to make of the flower shop sign in the street saying ‘flowers never fail to make someone smile’, or the chalk board outside the pub declaring ‘work hard and be nice to people’? These, in the end, we dropped into a new category of ‘public education’ alongside the pharmacy health posters warning of the need for vaccination or the potential to spot the early signs of cancer.

As we walked we used a blank sheet of paper to create an emerging messy map that documented the sequence of learning invitations that we noticed on either side of the street and used photography to capture every instance we saw. In particular, photography was particularly useful for allowing us to document for later analysis the abundant invitations that make up community noticeboards.

Walking as method, however, needs to be recognised as an embodied and sensuous methodology (Stoller 1997; Pink 2012 & 2015). As researchers walking a city street, we are ourselves implicated in the way that the street shapes us, our expectations and our gaze (Valentine 1996). There are places we are comfortable to walk at particular times of day, and places we feel less relaxed. As we are learning on the move (Bates & Rhys-Taylor 2017), we are engaging with the city's own dynamic, ever-changing rhythms. As Edensor (2010) noted, "walking bodies are rhythmic elements in a complex amalgam of rhythmicities" (p. 71), and our walks are part of the rhythmical unfolding of the city, as we are continuously adapting to the flows, stylistic conventions, materialities, regulations, and interruptions of the streets. There are times when we may not feel comfortable loitering, as women trained to be alert to risk in public spaces. As two white non-religious women, British and Polish, we will necessarily miss and misunderstand some elements of the cities that we are walking around. There are some sounds and smells that will arrest our attention as novel or strange and others that we will miss. And because we are walking our own city, there are places that may be over-familiar, that we can no longer 'see' because they are the background infrastructure of our lives. In writing the story of the public pedagogies of the city, in documenting the learning infrastructures of the city in this way, we are necessarily paying attention only to what we notice—we cannot claim that these invitations to learning are interpreted in the same way by all a city's inhabitants. Indeed, we recognise that we are operating within the limits of any textual reading of a cultural activity—that we are reading through our own lens, a problem familiar from any form of textual analysis as evidenced by reception theory (e.g. Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler 1992). It is with this provisionality in mind that we present these accounts

of the learning infrastructure as we encountered it during these walks, and it is with the aspiration that this method might be used to generate and proliferate accounts of the everyday and interconnected public pedagogies of the city, to stimulate alternative readings and narratives of different ways of ‘reading’ and ‘walking’ the city, that we present this here. In other words, this is not an attempt to provide a totalising reading of the city, but to offer tools to generate multiple and competing readings and a basis upon which these might be discussed.

## **The walks**

### *Gloucester Road*

The Gloucester Road, from Egerton Road to ‘the Arches’ (the Victorian railway bridge that runs high over the street and carries passengers over to Clifton), is an intense mosaic of independent shops shot through with pubs, cafes, the odd supermarket. It forms one stretch of a busy narrow road that runs from the centre of town all the way to the motorway; it is a main artery for the city. Either side of the road are Victorian suburbs, a park overrun by families and students in the summer, and houses increasing in price on the west side due to proximity to a highly rated state school. Its relative wealth only relatively recent in the city, the stretch that we walk has the occasional sporadic tree, two lanes wide with a perilously narrow bike lane on each side, bordered by shops and houses giving immediately onto the pavement. The buildings are terraced, no more than one storey tall, a mix of Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with witty and political street art appearing on many blank walls and side roads. On Saturdays, this is an intensely bustling place with queues for the butcher’s homemade burgers and the fish shop’s fresh oysters jostling alongside the stacks of

hay from the pet shop and crates of plastic boxes from the pound shop. This is a mixed economy of charity shops and expensive, sourdough-serving artisan bakers.

Our learning walk here takes some time. It is a communicative street, notices and flyers proliferate; community noticeboards welcome visitors at the entrance to supermarkets and cafes; invitational graffiti from small stickers to impressive large-scale art distract attention from the shopping at hand. We are distracted and tickled by the offers of placenta encapsulation on the noticeboards (something that seems distinctive to this area). To those who know the street though, it is clear that some of its learning invitations are invisible to our walking methodology. The top floor café hidden from the street where people gather monthly to write letters for Amnesty International, would not be visible to the Saturday stroller. Nor would the expert advice and guidance in the DIY store where men who know how to fix things serve hapless or curious customers wondering whether this screw would work for this size of shelf. Knowing the city here engenders caution when walking and reading other city streets, knowing that its invitations to learning will not be visible to the newcomer. Such an observation makes clear, therefore, that the learning city is relational; its invitations dependent upon the encounter between this particular person and this particular place at this particular time. The infrastructure is enacted through the encounter.

### *Stapleton Road and St Mark's Road*

This circular route connects two high streets in the same area of the city, Easton, a working-class community with a significant Asian and African origin population that is rapidly gentrifying. In the shadow of the M32, the motorway that runs into the city

centre, this part of town is cut off from more affluent areas of the north of the city by motorway underpasses that are now thriving sites for skateboarding and graffiti culture. The high street as we followed it on a sunny/showery Saturday morning runs along Stapleton Road—an eclectic mix of halal butchers, large fishmongers, hairdressers, beauty parlours and fast food shops with posters advertising international money transfers—before looping back along St Mark’s Road, an area known across the city for its famous Sweet Mart, a sprawling independently owned supermarket specialising in high quality and high quantity Asian food and delicacies, alongside staples, and which proudly displays its 50-year history in the area through photographs throughout the shop. Stapleton Road is a major thoroughfare heading east; a bus route with the occasional tree, single storey Victorian terraces, and shopkeepers displaying posters enjoining customers and residents to keep Easton tidy. St Mark’s Road starts and finishes with tall terraced Victorian houses, in the middle which is a hub of lively cafes, food shops and restaurants next to the local train station with its connections into the city centre. At the end of Stapleton Road is a mix of cafes, the Islamic study centre and adverts for ballroom dancing and the scouts; the road finishes at the large Eastville park, home to the annual Eastville music festival. This walk is the only time we are stopped to ask what we are doing as we take photographs and notes. Two young African heritage men running a café ask why we are taking photos and if we have permission to do so. We discuss the project with them and ask if they would like us to delete the data; they are happy we haven’t photographed them and they let us continue. Later a middle aged white man approaches us, walking fast after us down the street to find out what we are doing. He is curious as to whether we are Londoners coming to check out the place before buying, such is the expectation of gentrification in this area at the moment. These two



questions draw attention to tensions in the area: the young black men who likely have had enough of being stopped, searched and documented without their permission, as well as the pricing out of long term residents as buyers with more wealth entering the area.

Our walk here is one that is punctuated by three publicly owned formal community noticeboards, painted a uniform orange and displaying the same eight posters—a mix of community consultation notices, creative workshops for children, and updates on activities from the local arts and community centre. This is not the haphazard jumble of cards and flyers seen elsewhere on shop doors, but a curated and intentional effort to disseminate officially sanctioned information. Here, also, we note anti-fascist posters, the first we have seen in our walks around the city, alongside huge quantities of music and arts entertainment events that span everything from opera to hip hop to classical sitar music. The learning opportunities here are rich and diverse; only absent are formal institutions—there is no library, no school, no established university presence other than the request for volunteers to participate in an alcohol dependency study and the ghosts of a university in the posters from the Barton Hill Settlement, a community centre set up in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the university but long since independent.

### *Whiteladies Road*

We walked the Whiteladies Road and Blackboy Hill, names redolent of Bristol's slave trade past, on a sunny Friday. The walk starts at a busy roundabout, well-tended with huge and regularly changing flowerbeds overlooked on two sides by large Victorian civic buildings: the first is the 'Victoria Rooms', the music department for

the university, and the second is the Royal West of England Academy, the Bristol Art School and Art Gallery. From this architecturally impressive start, Whiteladies Road makes its gracious way north. On the side streets either side of the road are large Victorian villas, many subdivided for students, and others owned by families with large cars in the drive and the wealth to maintain the gardens. For some of the route, the road is wide, tree lined, edged on either side by gardens and grand houses, now given over to businesses and the BBC, including the nationally celebrated Natural History Unit. Further up, the road narrows a little, twists, becomes populated by cafes, bars, interiors shops, and is met by Cotham Hill, where a jumble of post office, charity shops, vintage and health cafes spills into a major intersection with Whiteladies Road. The train station, the modern shopping centre, and a department of the university cluster next to each other. Further up again, the trees return, the road widens out. Shops are stolid, with established, large glass windows and selling expensive sofas and bathrooms; there are banks, supermarkets, high-end restaurants. As the road heads steeply up towards the large open spaces of the city's downs land at the top of the hill there are smaller shops: fishmongers, estate agents proliferating, organic vegetables. Churches punctuate the road; a library half way up is still in service; the final church has been turned into a gym.

Our learning walk here takes little time. There is less to document, less to notice than in other areas of the city. We are entertained by the fact that this is the only area in which we notice classes teaching cocktail making; and by the steam punk 'museum' selling expensive vintage Victoriana, but it seems an uncommunicative space, lacking in invitations to engage with the world. Even the invitations to collective action from charities are self-oriented; all directed towards charity walks, runs, hikes—more

associated with healthy leisure activities than anything else. Where else, and how else, do people here find their opportunities to expand their horizons? Not from the street it seems. Notably, this is the home of sites of educational prestige—the BBC, the university—and yet around it, is what feels in comparison to our other walks, a learning desert. The possibilities of and invitations to expanded action are sparse.

### **Learning skylines**

Just as a city has a distinctive skyline, so too, we would argue, do different areas of a city seem to have distinctive contours in terms of the learning resources available.

While the same walk next week will bring changes in the posters, in the noticeboards, in the classes on offer, quantifying what we observed in the walks does allow us to produce an overview of the general ‘feel’ or learning skyline of the learning resources in each area. We can see where calls to civic action and participation in public life are strong and where weak; we can see which areas are well served by formal institutional resources, and we can see patterns of invitation to informal learning. The chart in Figure 7.1 might be read as an impressionistic snapshot of each area—imagine Monet painting Westminster bridge at night; it gives a feel for the place rather than its formal photographic representation. Equally usefully, it allows us to check our subjective observations and feelings as we walked. Were there really so few invitations to participate in informal learning in Whiteladies Road, an area with large numbers of students and affluent families potentially with time on their hands? So many music and entertainment posters in Easton? It allows us to consider whether Gloucester Road’s reputation for hippy activism is justified as the opportunities for civic action of environmental and social forms outnumber those of the other areas. It raises other questions: Why/are there more public education announcements in

Easton, or is this picture skewed just by two particular pharmacists' distinctive enthusiasm for promoting health interventions? Why/does the presence of formal educational sites seem to correlate with fewer numbers of informal learning activities?

Insert Fig 7.1 about here

When we look (see Fig 7.2) at the types of activities that form the basis for invitations to participate in informal learning we see interesting patterns emerge across the city and between areas. The different demographics of the city, for example, are reflected in the relative numbers of appeals to parenting or children's activities in the three areas—as the wealthier, student-rich Whiteladies Road has relatively fewer than the younger, more family oriented St Mark's/Stapleton and Gloucester roads. Wellbeing courses, focusing on mental health, self-care, are also relatively less visible in St Mark's/Stapleton Road—reflecting what? A stronger more resilient community? Or less disposable income to spend on such activities? At the same time, we note that citizenship test and language services are nowhere to be seen along Whiteladies Road.

Insert Fig 7.2 about here

These observations would need to be repeated many times before it was possible to argue for robust patterns of learning activities in these areas. Nonetheless they do encourage us to ask questions and to unsettle some taken for granted assumptions about the resources that might be available in different areas of Bristol as a learning city.

## **How might we understand the everyday invitations for public pedagogy through these walks?**

If we return to Sandlin et al.'s (date) typology of public pedagogy as we interpret it through these walks, we can see that there are some notable absences and patterns at street level. The public intellectual and the university, for example, are absent from these walks save through their physical presence as city buildings. Clearly the medium of the public intellectual is no longer the city street (if it ever was other than for a short period in the 1960s), and the public invitation to participate in Universities is channelled through sanctioned routes targeting specific 'hard to reach' sectors. Nonetheless it is worth wondering what is lost by the invisibility of the intellectual from the streets, given that, at previous critical historical moments, this was an important site for action and participation (Marshall, 1992).

Also limited in these three areas, is the role of graffiti or street art as part of an ongoing dialogue with city participants. Where street art does exist, however, it can be read as a relatively stable and in some ways sanctioned work of identity building. The multi-coloured almost mythical image (see image 7.3) of the Pangolin on the side of the Easton café with the message 'the Pangolin, most trafficked animal in the world' in an area rich in migration stories and battles for citizenship, invites reflection on the interactions between human and animal, movement and global trade.

INSERT 7.3 ABOUT HERE

On Gloucester Road, the side alley completely transformed by a mural (7.4) depicting politicians as puppets and jokers, and publics as mindless observers, participating in pointless voting, is a provocative and powerful challenge to notions of democracy as participation in elections. It is glanced side-on as you walk down the main street, an unsettling moment of disruption, an eruption of critique in the everyday walk to work or the shops.

INSERT 7.4 ABOUT HERE

Both murals remain unmarked by other graffiti artists and taggers and untouched by local authority wall painters; they are becoming part of the everyday landscape of these streets.

Equally rare on these walks is the work of memorialisation and heritage learning. Civic memorials were restricted in the main to engraved stones in church walls bearing the names of the local citizens who laid them with no further explanation; we are asked to remember these ghosts of people unknown and unexplained. The only museum was a tongue in cheek ‘steampunk’ museum framed to sell expensive ‘vintage’ artefacts, and whose commitment to public learning might be tested should anyone come in seeking to understand more with no intention to buy. More intriguing were the two examples of memorialisation in the Barber’s Shop on Gloucester Road and in the Bristol Sweet Mart. In both locations, there are signs and photographs celebrating over 50 years of successful trading and tracing routes from, in the former case, Italy, and in the second case, Uganda. These photographs narrate a history of migration and integration, the interweaving of global and local histories encountered

through the everyday business of buying groceries or having a shave. Encountering these is learning a narrative of the city as dynamic, interconnected, and of its people as resourceful, diverse, and committed to making a positive change and place in the world.

Invitations to participate in informal learning and in civic action, in contrast, are abundant, proliferating in flyers, posters, business cards—from calls to join protest marches and campaigns, to weekends of self-discovery, from children’s creative art workshops, to offers of walking and friendship groups. Critical to this abundance is the everyday learning infrastructure of the shop windows, doors, walls and noticeboards that act as mechanisms for circulating and communicating learning activities in the city. This infrastructure, however, productively troubles simplistic divisions between ‘public’ and ‘private’ learning resources. The noticeboards and shop windows promote learning opportunities that are sometimes publicly available to all, sometimes only for those who have the resources to pay. Many noticeboards are located in supermarkets where anyone can put up any notice with no prior vetting by the manager; these shops are private companies offering a publicly accessible means of communication to support public activities. Other noticeboards are community- or publicly- owned, with glass doors in front of the flyers; see Fig 7.5.

INSERT Fig 7.5 ABOUT HERE

In most of these cases there is no information about how to get information onto the board; these effectively become, therefore, private mechanisms for promoting particular forms of learning opportunity. Many of these ‘public’ (private)

noticeboards are out-of-date with faded notices, their presence less a sign of thriving community dialogue and more redolent of the need to pay lipservice to civic consultation. Interestingly, many are tagged and hard to read. Healthfood shops position themselves ambiguously between openness and constraint; often actively curating their noticeboards (see 7.6) , being clear that notices need to fit their ethos, that they will only be displayed for limited amounts of time. In both supermarkets and high-end healthfood shops, it is clear that the community noticeboard is part of the active construction of an aesthetic and ethic of community engagement – how far what could or could not be promoted there is debatable.

INSERT Fig 7.6 ABOUT HERE

These learning opportunities displayed on flyers, posters, business cards sometimes have a hyperlocal identity. One shop on Gloucester Road, for example, (one of the few remaining knitting and wool shops in the city, Fig 7.7) is notable for its posters that specifically address women. Here in this shop window, we saw invitations to participate in a female circle of elders to address contemporary social challenges, to join a female retreat, to harness women's power for social good. Does the wool shop summon women who may be interested in aligning themselves with other women to learn together to address social change? Or does shop owners' commitment to this identity keep the wool shop open? Who knows. The sign at the top of the window that reads 'please note this window the property of [shop name], posters displayed are put here by me, [owner name]', however, suggests that these choices are intentional rather than haphazard.



INSERT Fig 7.7 ABOUT HERE

The appeal to women and mothers across all the noticeboards was also apparent. The experience and fears and communities of pregnancy underpin many of the invitations to mothers' groups, to activities that can be done with children, to pregnancy classes and care. Men were addressed specifically only in the example of the invitation to join the Bristol Men's Choir. Are these noticeboards gendered? Is there a specific dialogue that happens between women in these places? Does the presence of these noticeboards in food shops and cafes bring a gendered dimension to the modes of address and forms of learning opportunities on display?

## **Conclusion**

The walking methodology we have described here aimed to explore invitations to inhabitants to participate in learning at the street level of the city. Such walks have their limitations, as we have already discussed: they are constrained to offering a particular narrow temporal viewpoint onto a necessarily dynamic phenomenon; they are necessarily dependent upon what can be seen, tasted, felt by that particular walker with their knowledge of that particular place; they cannot tell us about how people respond to the learning invitations in the city; they focus (in this instance) on high streets where rents may be higher and, therefore, where other learning opportunities such as those in community and civic centres may be less visible. What they offer us, is a view of the learning resources that co-exist with our sites of commerce and everyday public places rather than those to which a city inhabitant might make an intentional journey. Nonetheless, its contribution is to help us understand that there is

an invisible (to the education and city planner) economy of informal learning operating in the city which is abundant, dynamic and which transgresses simple boundaries between public and private learning facilities—from the memorialisation of personal histories and international narratives of migration in the shop/museum that is Bristol Sweet Mart to the co-dependency of healthfood shops and community noticeboards.

As Pierce and Lawhon (2015) argue, however, the value of walking methods is ‘to shape questions rather than support specific conclusions, requiring the researcher to further interrogate impressions generated from walking.’ (p. 660) And we have a number of questions arising from these walks. First, we have questions about what we didn’t see. Much of the Learning Cities literature is oriented towards upskilling citizens for the ‘knowledge economy’ with the development of individual capacity to operate in changing workplaces and in digital environments. And yet, we saw very little in the way of opportunities to learn digital, employment and workbased skills. Indeed, these were only visible in the St Mark’s Road/Easton area in the local Learn Direct centre. Instead, when we look at the resources that are on offer here, we see invitations to participate in activities associated with mental health, wellbeing and personal and emotional development. Indeed, our analysis of these learning invitations might suggest that the informal and everyday learning culture of wealthy and middle-class areas of Bristol as a city is characterised *not* by the adaptation of its citizens to the exigencies of the knowledge economy, but to an often-individualised personal inquiry into surviving in that context already. Such an observation may have many causes. It perhaps reflects the parlous state of mental health care in the UK and the relative wealth of individuals in different parts of the city to address that

deficiency. It may also suggest, as does the high level of arts, craft and health based activities on offer, that individuals with sufficient economic resources continue to value learning and personal development for their own sake. Whether this reflects the lived realities of these inhabitants would, of course, require further investigation using different methods; we will need further empirical work to understand whether these texts and these invitations reflect the lived practices and readings of citizens and what underpins the seeming absences we have noted.

We also have questions about the economy of these informal learning invitations. We note that these invitations to learn are, in the main, commercial. With the exception of civic engagement activities such as charity volunteering, marches or self-help groups, we need to recognise that the informal learning opportunities we describe here are far from a truly ‘public pedagogy’. They are subject to a market logic, accessible only to those with disposable income. Where do people go to access these sorts of activities if they have no money to pay private practitioners? Who is providing truly public pedagogy that addresses these fundamental questions of meaning, purpose and identity in contemporary conditions? Is this an area where universities and public intellectuals might begin to shape a new role? This chapter is part of a wider research agenda where we will continue to explore these questions.

Finally, as researchers interested in learning cities as an international phenomenon, these walks also make us ask whether what we have found is distinctive to Bristol or replicated in other cities. What would the learning skyline of other cities look like? What happens when others take the methodology we have elaborated here and apply it to their own city (or suburban/rural) high streets? Our informal walks in other areas

suggest that the informal learning landscape elsewhere may be fundamentally different, but we leave this for others, working in their own cities, to determine.

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